

Solano County Health & Social Services Department
In-Home Supportive Services
2006-2007 Solano County Grand Jury

Reason for Investigation

Under the authority of Penal Code §925, the 2006-2007 Grand Jury elected to evaluate the In-Home Supportive Services division of the Solano County Health & Social Services Department.

Grand Jury Actions

- Reviewed California Welfare and Institutions Code
- Reviewed Solano County Health & Social Services Department Policy and Procedures
- Contacted State Medi-Cal Fraud Unit
- Interviewed In-Home Supportive Services Supervisors and Social Workers

Background Summary

The In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program provides assistance to eligible aged, blind and disabled individuals who are unable to remain safely in their own homes without assistance. IHSS is an alternative to out-of-home care.

The IHSS is a state-mandated program which is supported by a U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld the rights of people with disabilities to live in their own communities. The Court, in Olmstead v. L.C. (1999) 527 U.S. 581, held that under Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), a disabled person has a right to live in the least restrictive setting possible.

Although the cost of the program increases approximately five percent per year, it is still considered to be more cost effective than institutional care. Approximately half of the program is funded by the Federal government with the balance funded by the state and local governments. Solano County funds approximately 4 million of the 37 million spent annually.

Recipients must have Social Security Disability Insurance income, Medi-Cal Insurance and be at or below the poverty level with a medical referral stating that they cannot live safely alone in the home. Social workers visit the home to determine which services are needed and to determine care hours. Currently this involves the completion of an extensive questionnaire.

Care falls into three categories: Domestic - housekeeping, preparing meals, assisting with feeding and shopping; Personal Care - bathing, dressing, bathroom assistance; Invasive - feeding tubes, bowel and bladder care. Caregivers may provide transportation. Over 80 percent of those who apply are accepted into the program.

Caregivers are hired and supervised by the recipient. Recipients can get a maximum of 283 hours of care each month. Caregivers are paid \$10.50 per hour. Although classes are offered for caregivers, only those giving invasive care are required to be trained.

Twelve social workers serve approximately 2600 people. In January 2007, there were 121 new requests for service. The largest number of requests recorded in any one month was 180. In 2006, service was terminated for 642 people.

An intake worker is required to visit each applicant within 30 days of the initial contact. Because of department staff vacancies and other absences, each social worker's case load has been increased to as many as 297 cases. Standard department procedures require a visit to the recipient's residence once a year. Social workers have been unable to keep up with the work load and at times have been up to eight months behind.

In January 2006, the State created an Office of Quality Assurance in each county to standardize the program. One result of this standardization is a quantitative approach to evaluating recipients. The first visit can take approximately five to six hours for an individual and at times a second appointment may be needed; couples may take longer. The social workers find this standardized program time consuming and hard to administer.

The Grand Jury was informed that the potential for fraud exists. Very few cases, however, are reported. Reported fraud cases are investigated by the State Medi-Cal Fraud Unit.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 - During the investigation, the Grand Jury was informed there is a potential for fraud. However, the number of fraud cases prosecuted in Solano County is very low. In a case load of approximately 2600 people, there were only six cases under investigation in 2006. There may be a number of reasons fraud cases do not get reported, including fear of losing care by recipients.

Recommendation 1a - Establish a task force to address perceived fraud concerns.

Recommendation 1b - Schedule unannounced visits by social workers to coincide with when the provider is present.

Finding 2 - In-home visits by social workers are not being completed as required.

Recommendation 2 - Take the steps necessary to determine the reason for the lack of compliance and correct this situation.

Comments

When interviewed, In-Home Supportive Services social workers appeared compassionate and dedicated. The social workers have expressed concern about increased case loads and the new standardized program questionnaire used to evaluate needed level of care. The social workers, through department administration, should communicate with state officials to streamline the process.

Affected Agencies

- Solano County Health & Social Services Department
- Solano County Board of Supervisors